Research Notes: John Arthur Laughlin (1875 - 1923)

Research Overview:

John Arthur Laughlin was born in 1875 in Iowa, the oldest of eleven children, and appears consistently in census records from early childhood through adulthood. His life was short, ending at age fifty, and much of what survives of him in the record places him within family households, first as an eldest child in a large and expanding family, and later as a husband and father whose adult years are defined by responsibility rather than advancement. The record is continuous but narrow, offering steady visibility without suggesting long-term security.

John spent his childhood in a family that moved repeatedly, largely within Iowa and for a shorter period in Wisconsin, as his parents' household expanded with the births of additional children. Census records place him consistently within that household through adolescence, one of many siblings growing up together. His brothers struggled in adulthood, but John's record shows continuity through marriage and the raising of a family. His work is marked by a series of lateral jobs, without advancement.

By 1900, John appears as a young adult living independently in Clinton, Iowa, unmarried and without a clearly defined occupation in the census record. Marriage in 1908 initiated a period of many moves, with John and his wife living in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois while raising a growing family. Newspaper notices in Iowa report John's family returning for occasional visits.

Between 1909 and 1917, John became the father of five children, one of whom died in infancy, with births closely tied to changes in residence. Census and draft records suggest steady employment, rented homes, and occupational shifts. In the record, he appears primarily as a husband, father, and employee.

John's life ended abruptly just days before Christmas in 1923, in an automobile accident in Chicago. Contemporary newspaper accounts focus on the circumstances of his death, the return of his body to Iowa, and his surviving family members rather than on the trajectory of his life. He was buried in Clinton, his wife's childhood home.

Speculative Narrative:

Intentionally left blank

Time Line:

1 Jun 1875 - Birth at Delhi, Delaware, Iowa.[1]

Jun 1875 - Baptism, possibly at Iowa.[2] Checked St. John's Church in Delhi. Records from this period could be better. The church or rectory burned and became a mission of St. Mary's, Manchester, till 1946.

16 Jan 1877 - Birth of sister Anna Elizabeth Laughlin (1877 - 1956) at Manchester, Delaware, Iowa.[3]

1879 - Birth of sister Rosella E Laughlin (1879 - 1918) at Delhi, Delaware, Iowa.[4]

1880 - US Census at Hopkinton, Delaware, Iowa.[5]

John Laughlin - white, male, age 30, born Iowa, father born Ireland, mother born Ireland

Rosa Laughlin - white, female, age 25, born New Jersey, father born Ireland, mother born Ireland

John A Laughlin - white, male, age 4, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey

Annie Laughlin - white, female, age 3, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey

Rosa Laughlin - white, female, age 1, born Iowa, father born Iowa, mother born New Jersey

[1] Birth

[2] Baptism possibly at Iowa

[3] Birth of sister Anna Elizabeth Laughlin

[4] Birth of sister Rosella E Laughlin

[5] 1880 - US Census

26 Jul 1882 - Birth of brother William Laughlin (1882 - 1926) at Brush Creek, Fayette, Iowa.[6]

26 Jul 1882 - Birth of brother Harry Laughlin (1882 - 1940) at Brush Creek, Fayette, Iowa.[7]

22 Nov 1884 - Probate at Fayette County, Iowa.

Note on the 1884 probate: The probate action places John in the legal record as a minor inheriting land, with disagreement over guardianship between his father and Edward Rice. The notes do not record the source of the inheritance or the court's final decision. The episode appears briefly and then disappears from the record, leaving no clear trace in John's later life.

5 Dec 1885 - Birth of sister Esther Susan Laughlin (1885 - 1957) at Arlington Fayette, Iowa.[8]

1885 - Iowa State Census at Arlington Fayette, Iowa.[9]

John Laughlin, 31

Rosa Laughlin, 30

John A Laughlin, 9

Anne E Laughlin, 8

Rosella Laughlin, 6

William F. Laughlin, 2

James H. Laughlin, 2

John Laughlin, 30

[6] Birth of brother William Laughlin

[7] Birth of brother Harry Laughlin

[8] Birth of sister Esther Susan Laughlin

[9] 1885 Iowa State Census, Arlington, Fayette County, p.361, Dwelling 47, Family 54, John Laughlin household; digital image, "Iowa, U.S. State Census Collection, 1836 - 1925," Ancestry.

As the oldest of eleven children, John appears consistently in the household during the years of rapid family growth and frequent relocation.

27 Jun 1890 - Birth of sister Mary Helen Laughlin (1890 - 1965) at Lyons, Marshalltown, Iowa.[10]

Dec 1894 - Birth of brother Leo Laughlin (1894 - 1909) at Wausau, Marathon, Wisconsin.[11]

22 Sep 1900 - Birth of sister Marguerite Ethel Laughlin (1900 - 1972) at Wausau, Marathon, Wisconsin.[12]

1900 - US Census at Clinton, Clinton, Iowa.[13]

John Laughlin - white, male, born ?, age 25, single, born Iowa, parents born Iowa.

Note on the 1900 census: The 1900 census is the first record in which John appears outside his parents' household. He is listed alone in Clinton, unmarried and without a clearly defined occupation.

[10] Birth of sister Mary Helen Laughlin

[11] Birth of brother Leo Laughlin

[12] Birth of sister Marguerite Ethel Laughlin

[13] 1900 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Clinton, Clinton County, Iowa, ED 11, Sheet 2, Dwelling 41, Family 41, Nellie Ryan household; digital image, "1900 United States Federal Census," Ancestry.

12 Aug 1908 - Marriage to Gertrude Helen Sheppard (1880 - 1958) at Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Pennsylvania.[14]

18 Aug 1908 - Marriage Announcement at Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Pennsylvania.[15]

"Announcement of the marriage of Mr. J.A. Laughlin, of Pittsburg, Pa., and Miss Gertrude Sheppard, of Clinton, was received in the city Saturday by Division Road master John Laughlin of the Iowa Central, and wife, parents of Mr. Laughlin. The wedding was celebrated at St. Paul's cathedral, Pittsburgh."

Note on the marriage record: The marriage is reported as news received by John's parents in Iowa, rather than as a local event attended by their families. The wedding took place in Pittsburgh, and the notice frames it as information conveyed after the fact. Subsequent references describe visits back to Iowa rather than a return.

26 Dec 1908 - Visited his parents in Marshalltown, Iowa.[16]

"Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Laughlin of Pittsburgh, Pa., arrived in the city Friday night to visit the home of Mr. Laughlin's [parents], Mr. and Mrs. John Laughlin."

16 Feb 1909 - Death of brother Leo Laughlin at Roland, Pulaski, Arkansas.[17]

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[14] Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) Orphans' Court, Marriage License Application and Certification, No. 12079, John A. Laughlin and Gertrude H. Sheppard, license dated 11 August 1908; Clerk of the Orphans' Court, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[15] "[Untitled] Announcement of the marriage of Mr. J.A. Laughlin …," Evening Times-Republican, Marshalltown, Iowa, 18 August 1908, p.6, col. 3; digital image, Newspapers.com.

[16]"[Untitled] Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Laughlin …," Evening Times-Republican, Marshalltown, Iowa, 26 December 1910, p.6, col. 3; digital image, Newspapers.com.

[17] Death of brother Leo Laughlin

20 Jul 1909 - Birth of daughter Helen Gertrude Laughlin (1909 - 1979) at Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Pennsylvania.[18]

1910 - US Census at Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Pennsylvania.[19]

John Laughlin - head of household, male, white, age 34, single, born Iowa, parents born Iowa

Gertrude Laughlin - wife, female, white, age 30, single, born Iowa, parents born Ireland

Helen Laughlin - daughter, female, white, age 1, single, born Pennsylvania, parents born Iowa

14 Sep 1910 - Visited his parents in Marshalltown, Iowa.[20]

"Mr. Arthur Laughlin, of Pittsburg, Pa., is in the city for a week or ten days with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Laughlin.

10 Feb 1911 - Birth of son John Arthur Laughlin (1911 - 1953) at Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Pennsylvania.[21]

20 Apr 1914 - Death of father John Arthur Laughlin (1850 - 1914) at Hillsboro, Traill, North Dakota.[22]

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[18] Birth of daughter Helen Gertrude Laughlin

[19] 1910 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Ward 11, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, ED 422, Sheet 4B, Dwelling 61, Family 80, Melvin Wylie household; digital image, 1910 United States Federal Census," Ancestry.

[20] "[Untitled] Mr. Arthur Laughlin …," Evening Times-Republican, Marshalltown, Iowa, 14 September 1910, p. 9, col. 2; digital image, Newspapers.com.

[21] Birth of son John Arthur Laughlin

[22] Death of father John Arthur Laughlin

22 Mar 1915 - Birth of daughter Mary Elizabeth Laughlin (1915 - 1997) at Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio.[23]

1915 - Military WWI Draft Card at Elkhart, Elkhart, Indiana.[24]

23 Apr 1917- Birth of daughter Madelyn Rose Laughlin (1915 - 1997) at Elkhart, Elkhart, Indiana.[25]

Note on early married residence: Between 1909 and 1917, John's children were born in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, reflecting continued moves

1918 - Death of sister Rosella E Laughlin (1879 - 1918) at Adair, Iowa.[26]

15 Feb 1919- Birth and death of daughter Margaret Laughlin (1915 - 1997) at Elkhart, Elkhart, Indiana.[27]

Find Margaret's death record and find out where she was buried. Probably at St. Mary's in Clinton, Iowa.

1920 - US Census at Elkhart, Elkhart, Indiana.[28]

[23] Birth of daughter Mary Elizabeth Laughlin

[24] United States, Selective Service System, World War ! Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917 - 1918, Indiana, Elkhart, Local Board 2, Serial Number 497, John Arthur Laughlin, born 1 January 1876; digital image, "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917 - 1918," Ancestry.

[25] Birth of daughter Madelyn Rose Laughlin

[26] Death of sister Rosella E Laughlin

[27] Birth and death of daughter Margaret Laughlin

[28]1920 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), Ward 3, Elkhart, Elkhart County, Indiana, ED 50, Sheet 2B, Dwelling 41, Family 66, John Arthur Laughlin household; digital image, 1920 United States Federal Census," Ancestry.

John Arthur Laughlin - head, rents, male, age 44, married, can read, can write, born Iowa, parents born in Ireland

Gertrude Laughlin - wife, female, white, age 39, married, can read, can write, born Iowa, parents born Ireland

Helen Laughlin - daughter, female, white, age 10, single, can read, can write, born Pennsylvania, parents born Iowa

John Laughlin - son, male, white, age 8, single, can read, can write, born Pennsylvania, parents born Iowa

Mary Elizabeth Laughlin - daughter, female, white, age 4, single, can't read, can't write, born Ohio, parents born Iowa

Madaline Laughlin- daughter, female, white, age 2, single, can't read, can't write, born Ohio, parents born Iowa

William F. Laughlin - male, age 36, divorced, can read, can write, born Iowa, parents born in Ireland

Thelma Maloney, 19

22 Dec 1923 - Death at Chicago, Cook, Illinois.[29]

"After being struck by an auto while crossing a street near his home in Chicago at 6 o'clock last evening, J.A. Laughlin, whose wife was Miss Gertrude Sheppard of this city, passed away at 12:05 o'clock this morning a broken skull being the immediate cause of death.

The body is to be brought back to Clinton this evening and taken to the home of J.L. Clark, his brother-in-law. Funeral services will be held at 9 o'clock Monday morning and followed by an interment in St. Mary's cemetery.

Left to mourn his death are his wife, four children, Helen, John, Mary Elizabeth and Madeline, his mother who is making her home with his sister, Mrs. Art Warham of Omaha, two other sisters, Mrs. Will Wheeler of Newhall and Miss Marguerite and two brothers, Will of Elkhart, IN and Harry.

Clinton Herald

[29] Illinois, Department of Public Health, Standard Certificate of Death, Certificate 33668, John Arthur Laughlin, died 21 December 1923, in Cook County; digital image, "John A Laughlin 1923 Death."

December 1923" [30]

"Ex - Elkhart Man Dies of Hurts

John A. Loughlin of Chicago is a Victim of an Automobile Accident

John A. Laughlin, 50, whose home was at 2301 Nordica Avenue, Chicago, and who until about a year ago was a New York Central storekeeper at this place, died in a Chicago hospital last evening shortly after being injured in an automobile accident, the details are not known here.

Word was received here this morning by Mrs. Brice Landon of 417 Collins Court, a friend of the family, in a long-distance call from Miss Helen Laughlin, a daughter. She said her father had suffered a fracture of both limbs and was otherwise injured.

The body will be taken to the old home in Clinton, Iowa, tomorrow. Mr. and Mrs. John Froehlich of 833 Hubbard Avenue expect to go to the bereaved's home tomorrow.

Mr. Laughlin is survived by his wife. Gertrude and the following children: John, Mary Elizabeth, Helen, and Madelyn, his mother, and three or four brothers. A brother, William Laughlin, left here last week to reside at Kankakee.

While in Elkhart, the family lived at 619 West Franklin Street. They left here last May to join Mr. Laughlin in Chicago; he had taken a position as a storekeeper with the Yellow Taxi Co. about six months previously. Mr. Laughlin, while here, was a member of St. Vincent's church.

DEATH: The Elkhart Truth Newspaper

Elkhart, Indiana

December 22, 1923

page 1" [31]

[30] Illinois, Department of Public Health, Standard Certificate of Death, Certificate 33668, John Arthur Laughlin, died 21 December 1923, in Cook County; digital image, "John A Laughlin 1923 Death."

[31] "Deaths: J.A. Laughlin," obituary, The Elkhart Truth Newspaper, 1923, digital image.

J**ul - Burial** at St. Mary's Cemetery at Clinton, Clinton, Iowa.[32]

Is he buried with his youngest daughter, Margaret Laughlin?

[32] Find a Grave